

LADIES' HOME JOURNAL

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A Year On The Road

"Say hi to Ohio for us!"

"New York!"

"Maryland!"

"California! Alaska!"

State names were practically pelting our van as my family and I pulled through the crowd of well-wishers at Kansas's Lawrence-Dumont Stadium, in Wichita, on July 4, 1996. We were off!

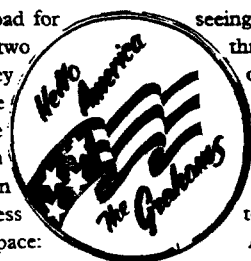
But reality was also setting in, and it was a bit frightening. My husband, Craig, and I had committed ourselves to hit the road for an entire year with our two young children, Courtney and Collier, to explore the U.S. All of it. Our home was now a customized van painted with an American flag, and our only address was somewhere in cyberspace: <http://www.usatrip.org/>.

How did this happen?

Actually, the idea of a cross-country excursion wasn't new to me. My mother, Maria, a native of Bogotá, Colombia, came to Virginia as a young woman, met and married my father, Paul, and later became a naturalized citizen. My mom loved her adopted land so much that in 1975, when I was seventeen, she decided we should tour the country for a year so my younger brother, Joe, and I would appreciate it as much as she did.

The next thing we knew, we were

We left everything behind to travel across America in a van. Crazy? Probably. Worth it? You bet
By Marlene Smith-Graham



seeing a mosaic of America through the windows of our Volkswagen Beetle and working as restaurant help, flower-shop assistants or farm laborers along the way to offset our expenses.

Although I had my doubts at first, this turned out to be the richest experience of my young life. My perspective on my country expanded dramatically from my limited view of the midwest. I would relive the memories time and again over the years, especially of the people we met. In years to come, I found an instant familiarity with people just by talking about their hometowns.

I also got to know my family better, and discovered that four opinionated, strong-willed people could come together to achieve a common

goal—and have fun doing it. Now, my husband and children and I were about to share our own year-long, fifty-state experience.

Perhaps the term that most aptly describes our need to depart from the status quo is "middle-class meltdown," brought on by fifteen-hour days as business owners; Craig had his own real-estate firm, and I had been publishing a Wichita monthly newspaper for ten years. We were starting to feel the effects of burn-out, combined with a latent wanderlust and a yearning to spend more time with our children.

One day I said jokingly to Craig, "Why don't we just take a year off and travel all fifty states, like my parents did?" The idea, of course, was totally impractical; for starters, we would need to sell the house to afford the trip. And wasn't it just plain crazy for us to risk our careers by jumping off the fast track?

Craig's immediate response: "When do we leave?"

We didn't even have to convince one-year-old Collier that going away would be fun. But Courtney, then nine, was as dubious as I had been as a teen: "What! A whole year?" Still, as our scheme took shape over the next two years, her enthusiasm mounted.

We broke the news to our astonished family members, friends and associates much later. We (continued)

PHOTOS: TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF MARLENE SMITH-GRAHAM; OTHERS: NURI VALERONA, THE MIAMI HERALD

A WOMAN TODAY

Continued

didn't want to give people time to talk us out of it. We sold our house and my paper, put most of our possessions into storage and bought our \$19,000 travel vehicle, an extended cargo van. We spent another \$11,000 having it customized by installing electric lines, appliances, a table and a sofa bed. We attended home-schooling seminars and arranged a year's curriculum for Courtney.

Our first goal on this journey was to get in and out of Alaska before winter set in. Apart from that, we had no set itinerary.

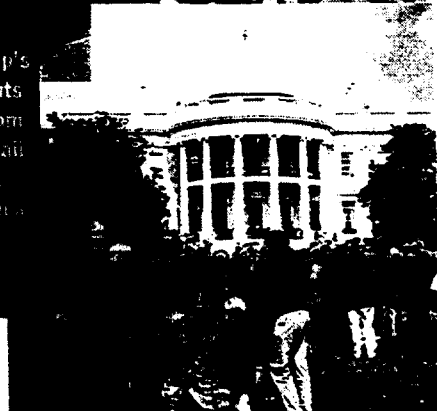
Four days after we took off, we found ourselves trying to wedge our van back out from beneath a motel overhang in Nebraska City, Nebraska. (We had forgotten that our van's raised roof would pose clearance problems.) Not a very auspicious beginning.

That episode didn't escalate, but many others did, especially in regard to Craig's male habit of never stopping to ask directions (one frustrating day, we circled Omaha three times within an hour), or when the kids or I would get cranky. Fortunately, while arguments easily ignite in the tight confines of a van, they are equally hard to maintain amid so many interesting distractions.

One of them was how big our adventure grew: Apple Computer Inc. loaned us a computer, and Brigadoon.Com Inc., an Internet provider in Washington state, sponsored and maintained a Web site for us, where Courtney and I would keep travel diaries and post our daily route. WAM! America's Kidz Network, a cable network based in Colorado, asked Courtney to report on our trip for them.



Among the trip's many highlights (clockwise from the top): Hawaii, Disney World, the White House and Four Corners Monument.



Even before we set off, we were deluged with E-mail. People suggested places to see and things to do. Many tacked on invitations: "By the way, when you're in our area, stop by for dinner." Strangers offered us free hotel rooms, spare bedrooms, floor space, campsites, warm showers, access to washing machines—even their services as personal tour guides.

We were stunned. What happened to all the Americans who were triple-bolting their doors to the outside world of crime? What happened to the cynicism and basic distrust we expected? What a welcome surprise to see that things hadn't changed much in two decades.

We knew from the start that we'd have to live rather frugally, on a travel budget of about \$2,000 per month. But our finances were severely stretched by airplane tickets to Hawaii (the one place we couldn't reach by driving) and a ferry ride from Alaska. So our meals *(continued)*

PHOTOS: CENTER RIGHT, COURTESY OF THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY; ALL OTHERS, COURTESY OF THE GRAHAM FAMILY

A WOMAN TODAY

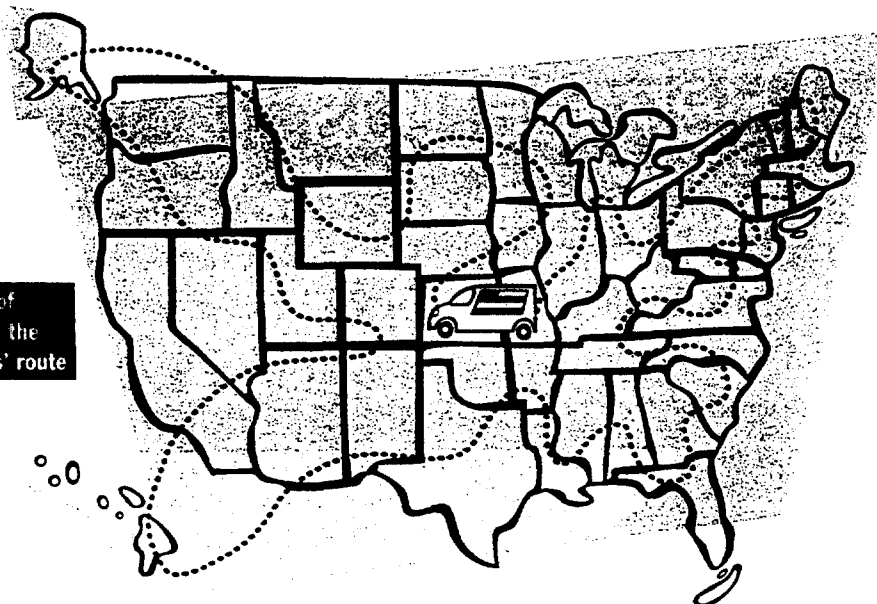
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were often simple and inexpensive, and we slept in economical hotels, in our van or in the tent we brought. Some of the wonderful people we met also treated us to meals, hotels . . . even opened their homes to us.

Among the highlights of the year was seeing more than one hundred national parks and monuments, using a yearlong parks pass. The kids got an unforgettable history lesson at sites such as Williamsburg, Jamestown and Yorktown, Virginia; Fort Sumter, in South Carolina; and the Outer Banks of North Carolina, including Kitty Hawk, where the Wright brothers first flew.

Christmas found us in Oklahoma City exchanging gifts, then visiting the site of the tragic bombing. In Iowa, we saw the covered bridges where *The Bridges of Madison County* was filmed and played on the *Field of Dreams* baseball diamond. We camped in a North Dakota zoo, met governors and

One lap of America: the Grahams' route



movie moguls, toured potato-chip, car and chocolate factories, harvested potatoes in Idaho, served as grand marshals in the Walt Disney World "Remember the Magic" parade and hunted for Easter eggs on the White House lawn. In New York City, we were interviewed on the *Today* show, saw the offices of *Ladies' Home Journal* and took in *The King and I*.

The one bump in the road we encountered was in Philadelphia, where someone broke into our parked van and took a portable TV, a cell phone and some small items. But as soon as word got out, hundreds of people E-mailed us, extending their apologies and hoping we wouldn't judge the city by one bad egg. We didn't; if anything, this only reinforced our belief in the

goodness and decency of Americans.

Each day is a major field trip. Often, we take advantage of special activities to supplement Courtney's lessons. For example, while she was studying *Romeo and Juliet*, we met a man in Orlando, Florida, whose son just happened to be playing the male lead in a community theater production of the play. We sat in on the dress rehearsal.

Nor has roadside education been wasted on Collier. Today, he can recite thirty state capitals (when he's in the mood), name his favorite volcanoes and rattle off the long list of animals he encountered.

Our only real problem has been time—or rather, lack of it. At the outset, our plan was to average a state a week, but that soon went by the wayside as we were tempted to explore all the hiking diversions in the mountain states. In February, we also took a five-week break at my parents' house in Florida.

At this writing, we're headed toward New England, with two months and

eleven states to go. As we reach the final phase of our adventure, we have mixed feelings. Of course, it will be exciting to come full circle. And we all look forward to sharing our stories with our friends and families face-to-face.

But we aren't as exhausted as we expected to be at this point, and we all wish we could go on for at least four more months. In order to meet our deadline, we're having to bypass many of the places we'd like to see and people we'd like to know better.

What will it be like to spend day after day in the same town again? And what will we do? The truth is, we're just not sure. We'll need to redesign our careers, rethink our futures and absorb all that we've learned. We might write a book. Our perspective on life is so much broader now; yet at the same time, our ideas of what we need for a happy life are much simpler. All those things in storage? We haven't missed them.

And, yes, we're already entertaining the crazy idea of taking another cross-country trip. This time, we'd like to

spend a year living in six separate areas and getting involved in community life.

Our U.S. tour has been as exciting, rewarding and educational as the first one I took. Most of all, we've developed an intense pride for the people who make up our nation—persons of all income levels, races and religions. Our country may not be perfect, but that's precisely what makes the U.S. so interesting.

We've seen the face of America, and she is beautiful. ●

If a cross-country odyssey isn't feasible for your family, don't sweat it: There are lots of ways to enjoy the great outdoors together this summer that are closer to home. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is a private, nonprofit organization devoted to making everyone aware of the resources available in parks nationwide. The NRPA also publishes a quarterly newsmagazine, "Friends of Parks and Recreation," that focuses on people who are helping to preserve and rebuild our parks. If you'd like more information, write the NRPA at 2775 S. Quincy Street, Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22206. To receive a subscription to the magazine, send a donation of \$15 or more to NRPA Friends of Parks and Recreation.



Kids love it.
Teachers need it.
Parents trust it.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**WAM! AMERICA'S KIDZ NETWORK BRINGS
Leonard Bernstein's Young People's Concerts
BACK TO TELEVISION WITH
"YOU GOTTA HAVE ARTS"**

***Press Conference to be Held at Carnegie Hall with
Alexander Bernstein***

New York -- March 4, 1997 For the first time in 18 years, the legendary *Leonard Bernstein's Young People's Concerts with the New York Philharmonic* will be returning to television via WAM! America's Kidz Network. The cable network, which is the only commercial-free channel for children 8-16, will include the *Young People's Concerts* as part of the most comprehensive arts education campaign ever on television: ***You Gotta Have Arts***. Designed to educate and entertain children through art, music, the performing arts and cultural enrichment, ***You Gotta Have Arts*** premieres in March, coinciding with Music in Our Schools Month.

Today, March 4 at 9:30 a.m., WAM! will host a special press conference at Carnegie Hall, where the *Young People's Concerts* were originally filmed, to present all of the ***You Gotta Have Arts*** programming to be featured on the channel. Scheduled to speak at the event will be Alexander Bernstein, son of Leonard Bernstein and president of the Bernstein Education Through the Arts (BETA) Fund, Inc.

"What a thrill it is to know that my father's *Young People's Concerts* will be enjoyed once again by a whole new generation on WAM!," said Alexander Bernstein. "These programs are as captivating, delightful and informative as ever -- perhaps more timely even now, with resources so hard to come by for music programs in schools. I am happy to keep my father's educational vision alive and growing."

Also speaking at the March 4 event will be Laurie Tisch Sussman, chairperson of the board of the Center for Arts Education; Schuyler Chapin, commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs and longtime friend of the Bernstein family; Steve Bell, president of Encore Entertainment Group; and Midge Pierce, vice president of programming for WAM!.

Leonard Bernstein hosted the *Young People's Concerts* from 1958 through 1979. The 25-part series was originally broadcast on CBS-TV. The conductor engaged the audience by asking a variety of musical questions and demonstrated the answers musically, bringing viewers toward a better understanding of music as an art form. Similarly, ***You Gotta Have Arts*** brings a modern television audience of children, parents and educators another method of incorporating the arts into day-to-day education.

-more-

Composer Richard Adler, who co-wrote the popular song "You Gotta Have Heart" for the musical "Damn Yankees," has given WAM! the rights to use the song in their *You Gotta Have Arts* campaign. Adler personally supervised the rewrite of the song for the arts campaign.

In addition to the *Young People's Concerts*, *You Gotta Have Arts* programming will feature two hours, every school day, of music and arts programs fully cleared for schools to tape and replay at their convenience. Series include the 12-part *Music Factory*, which teaches children about instruments; *Art Attack*, 44 episodes highlighting hands-on arts projects; *Musical Encounter*, 48 episodes which demonstrate the joy, difficulty and sense of accomplishment kids gain through performance; and *Planet Video*, a WAM! original co-production about talented kids throughout the world. *You Gotta Have Arts* will also produce ArtCams (short features on young performers) and WAM! Cams by 12-year-old WAM! roving reporter Courtney Graham, which will cover the state of contemporary culture in America. These vignettes run between shows in place of commercials.

The *You Gotta Have Arts* programming is part of WAM!'s commitment to provide subject-specific education on the channel, including math, science, social studies and language arts, every Monday through Friday for a total of 60 hours a week.

WAM! America's Kidz Network is one of Encore Media Corporation's quality cable networks and is available through Direct TV and all-day Sundays on *plex*, Encore's theme-by-day service which maintains a subscriber base of over 11 million.

EMC is the largest provider of cable and satellite-delivered television channels in the United States, currently counting more than 28 million pay units through its ownership of: ENCORE_{SM}, an affordable premium service featuring hit movies from the '60s, '70s and '80s as well as *plex-encore 1*_{SM}, theme by day (combined more than 11 million pay units); six Thematic Multiplex services -- Love Stories-encore 2_{SM}, Westerns-encore 3_{SM}, Mystery-encore 4_{SM}, Action-encore 5_{SM}, True Stories & Drama-encore 6_{SM}, and WAM! America's Kidz Network-encore 7_{SM} (combined theme channels have more than 12 million pay units); STARZ!¹-encore 8_{SM}, the first-run premium multiplex movie service (nearly 5 million pay units), and STARZ!²-encore 8_{SM}, featuring "prime time any time." BET Movies/STARZ!³-encore 8_{SM}, the first urban and black-oriented movie channel devoted to showcasing black film artists will launch February 1, 1997. In addition, EMC's International Channel_{SM} offers multi-lingual basic cable programming in 29 different Asian, European and Middle Eastern languages to 7.4 million subscribers in the U.S. and Latin America.

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Kids love it.
Teachers need it.
Parents trust it.

Encore Media Group's Position

The FCC should adopt a policy that qualifies programming channels focused on education or information with absolutely no commercials [regardless whether provided by for-profit or non-profit entities] as non-commercial education or information programming to be carried by DBS systems pursuant to the 1992 Cable Act.

This will . . .

- Encourage the private sector to solve a national societal need and . . .
- Comports with the Administration's national thrust for personal and corporate volunteerism
- Foster competition to increase and improve educational programming

WAM! . . .

- Private Sector Solution to Societal Need
- No Commercials . . . Content -- Not Ratings Driven
- Programming Focus on Education
- Positive Consumer Response
- Broad Governmental Support

Private Sector Solution to Societal Need

- Profits from Entertainment Channels Re-Invested for the Most Important Cause . . . Education of Our Youth
- Television is a Medium Which Is Too Powerful Not to Use to Teach
- Provides a Unique Alternative to Fulfill the Void in Positive Contextual Learning for Our Youth

No Commercials EVER . . .

- Our Kids Shouldn't be for Sale!
- Can't Serve Two Masters
 - What can motivate, inspire and educate . . . doesn't bring eyeballs to advertisers.
- Parents Endorse WAM! as Safe and Wholesome Alternative Viewing

Focus on Education

- Largest Provider of “Subject-Specific” Educational Programming in the U.S. . . .
 - More than All Other Children's Channels COMBINED
- Add Diversity and Global Perspective
 - Programming that Reflects Different Cultures from Around the World
- All WAM! Programs Instruct, Inspire, Motivate and Guide
- Targets Neglected and Underserved Adolescent Audience 8 - 16

Positive Consumer Response

- More than Two-Thirds of Parents Give WAM! “Good Marks”
- They Agree that WAM! is . . .
 - Safe for Kids to Watch . . . 79%
 - Fun for Children . . . 79%
 - Relevant for Children . . . 75%
 - Respect for Others . . . 71%
 - Wholesome Programming . . . 67%
- Majority Confirms WAM! Teaches Good Values and Problem Solving Skills

Broad Governmental Support

- **Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Commissioners**
 - Susan Ness -- *"And as WAM! demonstrates, educational and entertaining shows need not be mutually exclusive."*
 - Rachelle Chong -- *"I especially appreciate multicultural programming on WAM! . . . our children need to appreciate other cultures in order to be successful in the global village of tomorrow."*
 - James Quello -- *"John, I want to congratulate you on WAM! It's exactly what we need at this time."*

Broad Governmental Support

- **House Telecommunications & Finance Subcommittee Chairman Billy Tazin (R-LA)**
 - *"In a society that desperately needs positive messages, positive entertainment and positive educational experiences, WAM! has delivered."*
- **Congresswoman Eva Clayton (D-NC)**
 - *"Educational television (like WAM!) is an important resource for families and educators to explore our wonderful world."*
- **Congresswoman Connie Morella (R-MD)**
 - *"By the time children leave elementary school, they will have watched more than 5,000 hours of television . . . more time than they've spent in the classroom. If you think they're watching TV that's good for them . . . think again."*
- **President Bill Clinton**
 - *"I share your belief that responsible television can be a source of enrichment and education for our youth."*